

ENRD Rewired: DOJ Puts Energy Security in the Caption

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The Department of Justice has renamed its Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD) the [Energy and Natural Resources Division](#). Same acronym. Different signal. DOJ announced the change on June 29, 2026, after Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Adam Gustafson previewed the move in a Wall Street Journal op-ed titled “[New Name, New Mission at the Justice Department](#).” DOJ framed the change around a blunt proposition: “Energy security is national security.”

The rename is not just a branding exercise. It aligns DOJ’s environmental and natural resources litigation shop with the Administration’s broader energy program: domestic production, grid reliability, critical minerals, expedited permitting, defense of federal energy actions, and affirmative challenges to state policies DOJ views as anti-energy or federally preempted. [Executive Order 14154](#), “Unleashing American Energy,” directs agencies to identify and address actions that burden domestic energy development and instructs the Attorney General to consider litigation positions tied to those policy changes.

Why the Name Change Matters

ENRD has always handled more than traditional environmental enforcement. It defends federal permitting decisions, public lands decisions, energy infrastructure approvals, tribal and natural resource matters, and agency action across the federal environmental docket. DOJ’s announcement places that work squarely within the Administration’s broader energy-security agenda.

That is the point for regulated industry. DOJ is signaling that infrastructure, production, and reliability are not peripheral to environmental litigation—they are central to it. In practical terms, that means DOJ will be staffed and directed toward lawyers who understand the operational side of regulated facilities: pipelines, power generation, production, transmission, refining, waste management, permitting timelines, and the constant work of fitting square operations into the round hole of layered federal and state regulation.

But that does not mean environmental enforcement disappears. DOJ expressly stated that ENRD’s environmental enforcement work will continue. The better read is narrower and more useful: facilities should expect an enforcement philosophy that gives more weight to compliance, correction, operational reality, and energy reliability, while still reserving penalties and criminal enforcement for serious, repeated, and fraudulent conduct.

Compliance First Overlay

The DOJ rebrand also fits with EPA's recent "compliance first" orientation vis-à-vis its ["Reinforcing a 'Compliance First' Orientation for Compliance Assurance and Civil Enforcement Activities."](#) For industry, "compliance first" should not be read as "enforcement last." EPA and DOJ are signaling a preference for correcting violations efficiently, achieving timely compliance, and resolving matters without unnecessary punitive drag where the facility is acting in good faith. Companies still need to monitor, maintain, and update their permits, monitoring, reporting, corrective action records, and audit results—while communicating all of this to regulators in a disciplined, documented manner.

But these two actions, among others, signal a tone shift within the agencies. A compliance first program should favor getting facilities into compliance and keeping them operating lawfully, rather than allowing disputes to become endless penalty exercises detached from environmental outcome—and reality. The best regulated entities will use that shift by moving quickly when issues arise.

National Security Is Now Part of the Environmental Docket

The most important legal signal is the national-security framing. The Administration's grid reliability order states that rising electricity demand from AI data centers and domestic manufacturing strains the grid and that reliability affects national and economic security.

That framing changes the litigation posture around energy facilities. Environmental permitting disputes, infrastructure challenges, and related disputes may increasingly be argued not only as environmental or administrative law questions, but also as reliability, defense, supply-chain, and economic security questions.

The same point is reinforced by global oil-market pressure tied to Iran and the continuing strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz. Those external risks sharpen the domestic argument: energy infrastructure, reliability, and production are no longer being treated as ordinary regulatory subjects. They are being framed as national-security assets.

What Regulated Companies Should Take From This

The immediate takeaway is not that compliance risk has gone away. It has not. The takeaway is that the federal enforcement and litigation environment is becoming more operationally literate and more tied to energy security.

Companies should be prepared to show that they are operating responsibly, correcting problems quickly, and maintaining reliable service while complying with permits and environmental laws. That means compliance programs should be current, field-tested, and documented. It also means regulatory communications should be practical, technical, and tied to corrective action.

The new ENRD will likely be more receptive to arguments that lawful operations, energy reliability, and compliance solutions can coexist. But those arguments work only when the facility has the facts to support them.

The best posture is therefore simple: operate, document, correct, and communicate. The federal government may be moving away from enforcement for enforcement's sake, but it is not moving away from compliance. It is reframing compliance as part of the work required to keep energy and industrial infrastructure moving.

For assistance with regulatory compliance, permitting, enforcement, and related matters, please contact Tim Sowecke or Tyler A. Self. GableGotwals' [Administrative & Regulatory](#), [Energy, Oil and Gas](#), and [Environmental and Natural Resources](#) teams regularly advise clients on environmental, regulatory, and energy matters.



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